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# O Rosa Bella

Mass by Gilles Joye and Chansons  
by Dunstable and Bedyngham

ENSEMBLE DIONEIA · ENSEMBLE NOVA ALTA

## O Rosa Bella

Mass by Gilles Joye and Chansons by Dunstable and Bedyngham

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|---|--|
| John Bedyngham c.1422 - 1460  | Gilles Joye  |
| 1. O Rosa bella T.89, ff. 119v 3'54                                       | Missa Super O Rosa bella   |
|   | 7. Gloria T.90, ff. 421v-423r 6'15   |
|   | 8. Credo T90, ff. 423v-426r 9'10   |
| Anonymous   |  |
| 2. O Rosa bella o dulz anima mia<br>T.90, ff. 369v 3'07                   | John Dunstable c.1390 - 1453   |
|   | 9. O Rosa bella<br>T.90, ff. 362v-363r 1'57  |
| Gilles Joye c.1420 - c.1483   |  |
| 3. Missa Super O Rosa bella:<br>Kyrie T.90, ff. 421r 10'49                | John Bedyngham   |
|   | 10. O Rosa bella, <i>Concordancie<br/>o rosa bella cum alius tribus...</i><br>T.89, ff. 119v-120r 1'56 |
| Alan Hert (XV sec.)   |  |
| 4. O Rosa bella<br>T.90, ff. 444v- 445r 4'00                              | Gilles Joye  |
|   | Missa Super O Rosa bella   |
| Johannes Ockeghem?<br>c.1410/1425 - c.1494                                | 11. Sanctus T.90, ff. 426v-427r 6'27   |
| 5. <i>Alius discantus</i> Super O Rosa bella<br>T.90, ff. 444v- 445r 2'08 | 12. Agnus Dei T.90, ff. 427v-428r 4'50   |
| John Bedyngham  |  |
| 6. Gymel O Rosa bella o tu mi maria<br>T.90, ff. 361v-362r 2'07           | John Bedyngham   |
|   | 13. O Rosa bella, <i>Concordancie o rosa<br/>bella cum alius tribus...</i><br>T.89, ff. 119v-120r 2'12 |
|   | 14. Gymel O Rosa bella o tu mi maria<br>T.90, ff. 361v-362r 1'59                                       |

### Ensemble Dionea

Jung Min Kim *soprano, medieval lute*  
Teodora Tommasi *soprano, gothic harp, recorder*  
Serena Leonardi *fiddle, recorder*

### Ensemble Nova Alta

David Brutti *cornetto, recorder* · Andrea Angeloni *trombone, tromba da tirarsi*  
Stefano Bellucci & Pierluigi Bastioli *trombone*  
Danilo Tamburo *counter tenor, trombone*

Andrea Gavagnin *cantus* · Jonatas Monteiro *cantus* · Matteo Zenatti *tenor*  
Enrico Maronese *tenor* · Stefano Maffioletti *counter tenor*  
Nicola di Filippo *counter tenor*

Claudia Caffagni *conductor on "Missa super O Rosa bella" by Gilles Joye*

T.89 I-TRbc 1376 Codex Trento 89  
T.90 I-TRbc 1377 Codex Trento 90

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### Gilles Joye: a musical reprobate

Reconstructing the life of a fifteenth century musician often means sorting through the archives of cathedrals and music chapels. In the case of Gilles Joye what such research reveals is that he was a bizarre character with serious problems when it came to handling money.

Born in Courtrai around 1420, his musical talent won him a position as chorister in the music chapel of the Church of the Blessed Virgin. Then, at just over the age of twenty, he found employment at the Church of St. Donorius in Bruges. This was a singular appointment, since he had recently celebrated his first Mass, and according to the rules no cantor could be ordained priest. Yet Gilles was clearly given to disobedience, to the extent that the Chapter insisted that he went on a pilgrimage to atone for his misdemeanours.

Coeval archives and documents often mention Joye in relation to prebends and privileges that take him first to Clèves, and later back to Bruges. During this period he lived a life of luxury, well above his means, ultimately accumulating debts that forced him to sell all his possessions.

During the last years of his life he suffered from ill health, gradually becoming unable to hold services and to take part in musical performances.

He died on 31 December 1483, and the church fathers, anxious to avoid demands on the part of his creditors, made sure the funeral was a private event.

### Gilles Joye: his music

There are 5 Rondeaux and a Ballata attributed to Gilles Joye. The Rondeaux feature in songbooks of the late 1400s, including the Mellon Chansonnier (US-NHUB 91), the Banco Rari 229 codex and the Chansonnier Laborde. There is also a single Rondeau in the Trento 90 codex and a Ballata in Italian, *Poy che crudel fortuna*, in the manuscript P-Pm 714, kept in the Oporto Library.

Joye's secular music circulated in two geographical areas: northern France, where

the Chansonnier Laborde comes from; and Italy, where most of the song collections containing the Rondeaux were copied. To some extent the strong links between Italy and Flanders account for the increasing popularity of the French style in Europe.

Regarding Joye's musical oeuvre, it is interesting to note that his secular Chansons, especially those with lewd texts, enjoyed the widest circulation. For example in the Rondeau "*Ce qu'on fait a catimini*", which features in all the songbooks, the invitation to indulge without fear of divine judgment would seem to be expressed by a member of the clergy. The words are full of religious puns, using Latinisms to make fun of ecclesiastical language.

Ce qu'on fait a catimini  
touchant multiplicamini,  
maiz qu'il soit fait secretement,  
est excuse legerement  
in conspectu Altissimi.

The mass "*O Rosa bella*" comes from the Tr-90 codex kept in the library of the Castello del Buon Consiglio in Trent. One of the 7 tomes preserved at Trent Cathedral, it constitutes a fundamental source of sacred and secular music of the 15th century. In particular the codices Tr 89, 90, 91 and 92 are more recent, copied by Johanner Wiser of Munich between 1455 and 1465. The repertoire of the Tr 90 manuscript collection tallies closely with that of Tr 93. It is arranged according to musical genres, contains 328 compositions, largely by Flemish or English composers, and comprises a Rondeau devoid of text attributed to Gilles Joye as well as numerous versions of the Chanson "*O Rosa bella*". So it may well be that the mass "*O Rosa bella*" is also by Joye. In his book *The Rise of European Music*, Reinhard Strohm analysed the three masses on "*O Rosa bella*" contained in the Trento codices, comparing them with the work of the main composers of the period. He came to the

conclusion that they had a lot in common with Joye's secular works. In a document dated 27 November 1454, Gilles asked the Bruges chapter to allow him to return to his place in the chapter choir – a request that was granted on condition that he left his lover Rosabella, with whom he was openly living at the time. Preserved in the episcopal archives of Bruges, the exchange suggests that there was indeed a link between the musician and the masses composed around this subject.

### The Missa super “O Rosa bella”

This mass uses the subject of the Chanson “O Rosa bella”, a melody that was arranged by various composers during the course of the 1400s and used as the *cantus firmus* for a number of masses. Three of them are to be found in the Trent codices: the first in Tr89, for four voices and with no attribution; the second in Tr88 for three voices; and the third in Tr90, arranged for three voices and attributed to Gilles Joye. It is this latter mass that features in the present recording. It is a mass with *Cantus Firmus*, where the secular Chanson is constantly and completely used in the *Contratenor* part. Starting with the *Kyrie*, the voice of the *Contratenor* presents the Chanson as it is found in the Bedyngham or the Dunstable compositions, but with the *bicinia* intercalated by the *Cantus* and the *Tenor* voices. The initial *Kyrie* is in three parts, each one of which is repeated three times over. The structure of the individual parts is similar: a *bicinium* between two voices, with the addition of a third voice to conclude the section. The words are marked somewhat vaguely: in the first voice the syllables are positioned clearly, whereas for the other two voices the text is erratic and merely cited. This procedure is even more evident in the *Gloria* and the *Credo*, where the text also pertains to the religious function, in keeping with the liturgical tradition. Thus there are words indicated for all three voices in certain sections, and only for the *Cantus* in other sections, with the key words marked in the other two voices to signify unison, bearing in mind that at the time music was read in separate parts, and not in scores of the sort we are familiar with today.

The handling of the Chanson in the *Gloria* features complete exposition, followed by a return to the beginning, but with changes: the *Tempus* is no longer “*alla Breve*”, but “*alla Longa*”. The *Credo* is like a cantilena, with the text indicated only in the *Cantus*. For the *Credo* the Chanson is fully repeated twice, interspersed with numerous *bicinia* that are indicated in the manuscript with the word “*duo*”, possibly to indicate that only two singers were envisaged. The *Credo* is highly syllabic in structure, and there is a great deal of text to include, with the exception of the *Crucifixus* section, which is a duo in which the text dilates, especially in correspondence to the word “*Crucifixus*”. The *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei* follow the same principles, with complete exposition of the Chanson, interspersed with duo sections, where the music becomes more virtuosic, with more intense counterpoint and shorter rhythmical values.

### O Rosa bella: the story of a Chanson

The Chanson on the “O Rosa bella” text embodies two essential musical traditions: free composition in the form of a *ballata*, using the words in the Italian, as for example the version by Johannes Ciconia contained in the Urb. Lat. 1411 Codex, or the anonymous version found in the mS 2216 Codex kept in Bologna; or rearrangements using the same melody as a *Cantus Firmus*, written around the mid-1400s. The Trento 90 Codex comprises five such versions. The first on folios 361v-362r is curious because it uses the text in Latin, the words reminiscent of a prayer in worship of the Virgin Mary. The same folios contain two *Gymels*: a formula that derives from the Latin name *Gemellus* and that became widespread in England between the 13th and 15th centuries. It involves polyphonic lines added to the original *Cantus* that proceed in consonance of thirds and sixths, which was typical of English music. It is probably this connection with England that suggested the composition might be by John Dunstable, although the manuscript itself is anonymous. The presence of the transcription of a *Gymel* is very important because

this often meant a form of extemporaneous improvisation. On folio 362v there is another version of the Chanson, but with no text, also by an anonymous composer. The Chanson on folio 369v is also anonymous, but this time there is a text and it is in Italian - a version that we will meet again later. The last two versions are to be found towards the end of the Codex, in a section containing transcriptions of Masses and Motets, which is strange. Both bear attributions: the one on folio 444 to Alan Hert, who can perhaps be identified with the chaplain Bartolomeus Hert, a colleague of Joye's in Bruges around 1450 who does not appear to have written anything else in the Trent Codex; and the one on the lower part of folio 445, featuring the addition of a *Discantus super* "O Rosa bella" in what appears to be the same hand, initialled with the name of the famous composer Johannes Ockeghem. Differences of style in this version suggest that it may be the work of an imitator of the Flemish composer. There are also numerous errors in the counterpoint that make it almost impossible to play, which is why we have chosen to correct much of it. The last "O Rosa bella" is found on folios 119v-120r of the Trent Tr89 Codex, and here again there are no notes by the composer and the voices are not specified. Folio 120r, however, bears the indication "*Concordatiae o rosa bella cum alis tribus, ut posuit Bedyngham, et sine bis non concordant*", which makes it clear that it is the work of the famous English composer John Bedyngham. More problematic is the overlap of the 3 voices added to the original 3 voices of the Chanson in folio 119v, as indicated in the citation "*et sine bis non concordant*". Here again there are elements that don't tally, especially in the added voices, perhaps due to errors on the part of the copier. Because such discrepancy renders performance impossible, we have made the necessary corrections here as well.

The history of the text of this Chanson is interesting: the Ciconia version in the Urb. Lat 1411 Codex uses the following words:

O rosa bella, o dolçe anima mia  
 Non mi lassar morire in cortesia  
 Ay, lasso me dolente! Deço finire  
 Per ben servire e ben amare.  
 Socorimi omai del mio languire  
 Cor del mio cor, non mi lassar penare.  
 O idio d'amore, che pena è questa, amare  
 Vide che io moro tuto hora per questa iudea!

This text is erroneously attributed to Leonardo Giustinian, the Venetian jurist and composer of a very famous *canzoniere*. In actual fact content and meter reveal the text to be similar to *ballatas* that circulated in the Venice area at the beginning of the 1400s, some of them adopted and modified by Ciconia himself. The same text is used by Dunstable or Bedyngham in the Chanson that circulated throughout the 15th century and that was adopted and adapted in versions found in a great number of manuscripts. It thus seems likely that it was originally a folk song that was then arranged by various composers. In the Trent codices there are two versions with the text: the first on folio 362v, where the wording is that of Ciconia, with slight variations; and the second on the previous v/r folio, where the text appears in a Latin version:

O rosa bella, o tu mi Maria,  
 nos permette lassantes perire,  
 tu mitis pia virgoque diva,  
 nunc tua prece et iste vice  
 veniam deprecare  
 sic amore possimus deus eternaliter.

Thus while keeping the first three words of the secular text, the rose comes to signify Mary, and what was a profane Chanson becomes a song of devotion dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

### Instruments

For this recording we decided to use only two ranks of male voices for the *Missa*. There are various elements in the original manuscript suggesting that the vocal ensemble consisted of at least two singers for each voice: for example, the double notes or the canons where the word “duo” is indicated in the same part.

To keep as close as possible to the original codex, we decided to use instruments in the sections completely devoid of text, especially at the *Contratenor* and *Tenor*.

Considerable controversy surrounds the question of the use of instruments during religious services in the middle ages. Although it went against Church law, there is plenty of evidence to show that instruments were in fact used in combination with the voices: we know from Egidio di Zamora that in the 13th century the trumpet was used to arouse the congregation to worship God; and André Pirro has drawn attention to payments made to instrumentalists during the most important religious ceremonies.

However, there is evidence to show that it was during the 15th century that musical instruments were used more widely in religious services. In Burgundy, during the reigns of Philip III the Good and Charles the Bold, there were various sacred compositions where the trumpet was specifically indicated for performing the parts of the *Contratenor*, a practice that spread fast throughout central Europe. In fact the first reference to the use of a Cornet during the Mass dates back to 1501. As for the Trombone, there is evidence that the instrument began to appear in religious ceremonies even earlier: for instance in Naples in 1487, or in 1495 when Francesco Gonzaga brought his private chapel to sustain the voices during the Mass held to celebrate victory at the battle of Fornovo. In the very years in which the Trent Codices

were compiled, the Bishop of Trent had a consort of trombones that he often hired out for events and celebrations.

As for the Chansons, we decided to use female voices accompanied by a mixed instrumental ensemble in order to recreate the sound conjured up by the figurative tradition of the period, for example in the “Angel Musicians” painted by Melozzo da Forlì and Memling. By the same token, we have also avoided the concept of a homogeneous ensemble of the sort that became common practice during the Renaissance.

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*Translation by Kate Singleton*

All the music recorded for this CD was transcribed from the original Codices by Jung Min Kim and David Brutti.